FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

. 39, No. 6 December, 1988

Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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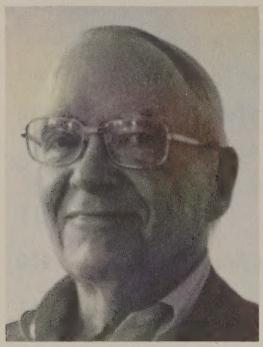
Cover Photograph by Tom Dunham



At the end of August I took part in a retreat devoted to the Tibetan Buddhist Path of Love and Compassion. The teaching was given by Lama Gelek Rinpoche and sixty of us took part.

I knew that the Tibetan people are strongly devoted to religion. It's the gravitational force which holds together the whole Tibetan people and the source of their rich cultural and spiritual life. Every activity is connected with religion, whether it's a social gathering, leave-taking, building a new house, or taking a new job. All are preceded by a religious ceremony, and individual devotions are performed morning and evening.

In the daily practice of their religion, Tibetans seek to attain the highest possible development of the love, compassion, and spiritual power of the Buddha, whom they believe to be still spiritually active; continuing to guide, inspire, and protect their spiritual life. All of their prayers, meditations, chants, and rituals are dedicated to the ideal of serving all beings with love, compassion, and wisdom in action.

At our retreat we arose every morning at 5:00 a.m., saying to ourselves "May all beings everywhere enjoy a day of love and happiness." Gathered in a circle around Lama Gelek, we concentrated our minds on generating Pure Thought—the strong desire to be awakened to the needs of others and to benefit them in any way possible. Visualizing the Buddha, we reflected on the progress—if any—we were making toward becoming more like him; more compassionate, more open and loving—less judgmental; less angry; less greedy; less selfish. Invoking the help of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have attained enlightenment and whose qualities of purity, wisdom, and compassion we seek to emulate, we chant their mantras and ask them to come to us and purify us.

"I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
By practicing generosity and the other perfections
May I be able to obtain enlightenment
For the benefit of all sentient beings."

With deep regret, from the bottom of our hearts, we seek to cleanse ourselves of all the wrong things we have ever done, the commitments

we have broken, the evil deeds and guilt we carry around with us. We want to let them all go:

"Whatever non-virtues of body, speech and mind
I have accumulated from beginingless time,
I confess over and again with fervent regret from my heart."

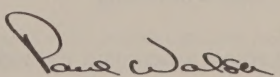
With the strongest commitment to never repeat these harmful intentions or actions, we beseech the Enlightened Beings from the Pure Buddha Lands to strengthen us and protect us from our own bad karma:

"*Om Mani Padme Hum.*
Om ta re tu ta re tu re sva ha.
O glorious and precious protector,
Come and take your seat in my heart,
And keep me safe in your great kindness.
Bless me to become like you."

The final morning of the retreat we all gathered in a circle around a bonfire to participate in a ceremony of prayer and offerings for world peace. At the conclusion we tied prayer flags, carrying our prayers for peace, to a cluster of brightly colored balloons and released them into the cloudless sky. As they drifted higher and higher, we joined hands, chanting *Om Mani Padme Hum*, until the last visible balloon, with its fluttering prayer flag, had become one with the blue immensity of the heavens.

Tibetans believe that as they turn a prayer wheel, or as a prayer flag blows in the wind, the recitation of the prayer, or mantra, is continued. The currents of air activate the mantras, which are then carried to the four corners of the earth, the universe, and the countless Buddha Lands beyond the galaxies. There they are heard by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, whose immense spiritual power can thus be invoked to help bring about peace in a world united by prayer.

As I chanted and watched the balloons drift westward, it seemed not too far-fetched to think of the pages of Fellowship in Prayer as prayer flags. The spiritual power of the words on the pages, as well as the love and compassion each of you generate as you read, may be far-reaching, indeed. Peace be with you.



Paul Walsh
President
Fellowship in Prayer, Inc.

Grace strikes us when sometimes, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. *You are accepted.*"

Paul Tillich

Know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty.

Albert Einstein

The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments.

Abraham Heschel

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life.

Mt. 7.14

What finally matters is that our hearts become like quiet cells where God can dwell, wherever we go and whatever we do. The more we train ourselves to spend time with God and God alone, the more we will discover that God is with us at all times and in all places. Then we will be able to recognize the Divine even in the midst of a busy and active life.

Henri J. M. Nouwen

Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid!"

Robert Browning

The emotions contain the seed of freedom and as well, the seed of imprisonment.

Chögyam Trungpa

The Light Inside

HERBERT A. KENNY

"Where do you suppose he is?"

She stood by the window peering through the rain-streaked, night-darkened pane toward the street.

Occasionally headlights of automobiles would run their bright smear down the road but they did little else to ease the obscurity. After each set came and went, she would repeat the question.

He waited until she put his name to it,—"John, where do you suppose he is?"—before removing the pipe from his mouth.

"Somewhere in Worcester, Alice, hitchhiking east."

"Tonight! In a storm like this?"

"All college freshmen, returning home for Christmas vacation, hitchhike whether or not you send them airfare." She turned from the window. He continued:

"Nor wind, nor rain, nor dark of night or something or other or anything else, can stop these idiotic messengers on their self-appointed rounds."

"How can you make a joke of it? It's not as if he were 21. He's 17."

"Eighteen."

She stared through the window but only the silver and black of the rainy night peered back and she could not see to the end of the front walk.

"If you had only put that lamppost in, I could at least see if an automobile were stopping out front."

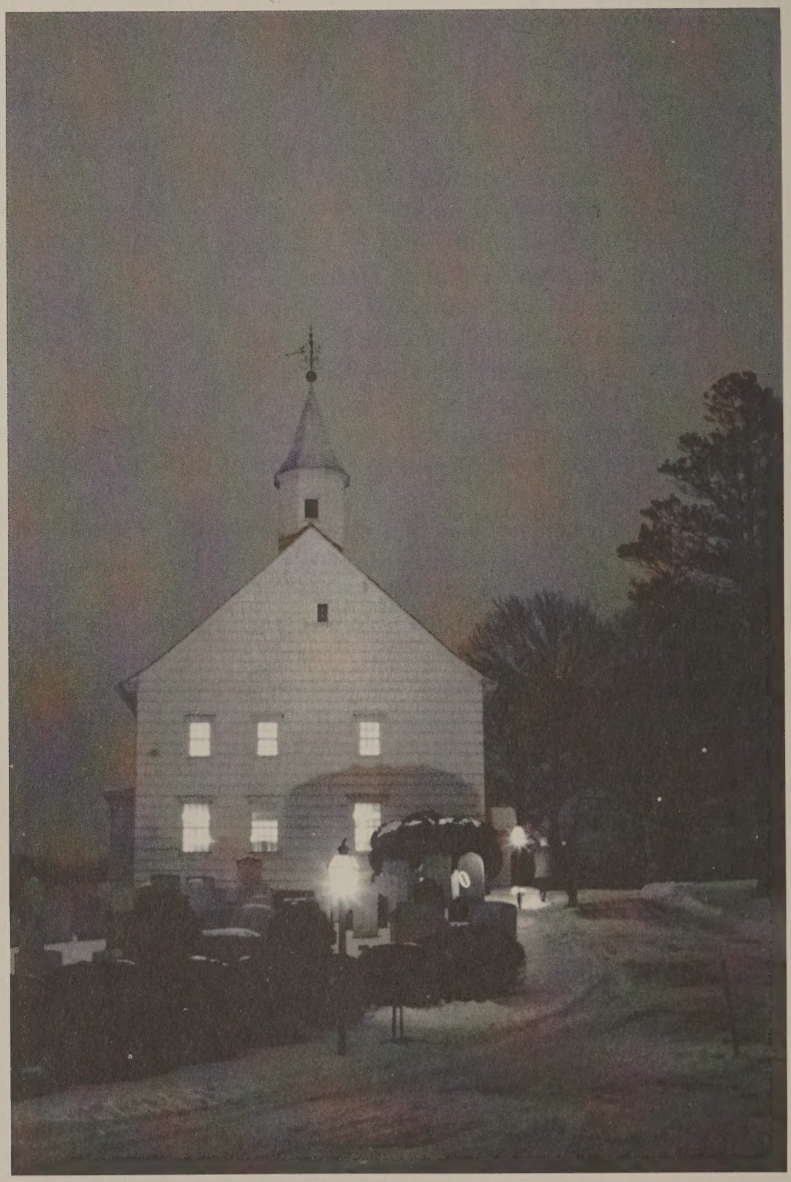
Hit by this thrust, he retreated from domestic dialogue and concentrated on his pipe.

"Don't you think we might drive out and find him?" Her voice was plaintive."

"If we knew which way he was coming, yes. He might after all fly home."

"Twenty minutes ago you were sure he had spent the fare on a dance or basketball tickets."

Herbert Kenny, the former Book Editor for the Boston Globe, *has written numerous books of poetry and verse.* Newspaper Row: Journalism in the Pre-Television Era *was published this year along with* Israel and the Arts *and* Chess Trivia. *Now retired, he lives with his wife Teresa in Manchester, MA.*



"That's the most likely idea."

"Now you think he might fly home."

"Always a possibility. I think we should sit—and I said 'sit'—Alice, until we hear from him. He did telephone home once, you know,—October, I think,—to say I hadn't signed a check . . ."

"You'd think he might at least telephone. He must know I'm worrying my heart out, and tired of praying."

"That's when I pray best," said John and returned to his pipe and his newspaper. "Quick, John, there's an automobile stopping out front. No, I guess not. I'm going to buy that lamppost myself, dig a hole and wire it. There must be some place near here where you can get an attractive one."

"You've been talking about it so long, I can't understand why you haven't bought it."

"It would have been nicer, you know, if you had. I rarely ask for anything like that."

There was nowhere to go after that but deep into the newspaper.

For fifteen minutes she kept her vigil and there was only the sound of the wind and the rain and an occasional sigh. Then suddenly:

"John!"

He jumped.

"Do you suppose he's gambling at that school?"

"Gambling?"

"That's where the plane fare went."

"Relax, Alice."

"Relax."

"And, John, if he won a lot of money they'd follow him. That sort of crowd. They'd rob him. He's probably been beaten."

"Alice, the kid doesn't gamble. He couldn't even afford the cards."

Silence.

"Where is he?"

"Past Worcester. Somewhere on route nine."

"John, there is a car. Oh my God, they're carrying him out of an ambulance. He's been hurt. John! get out there."

The man leaped to his feet, lost one slipper, stooped to pick it up, slipped, recovered and headed for the door.

"Someone's carrying him up the walk."

John finally made it to the door, fumbled with the catch, and pulled it wide.

The boy came across the landing, drenched. Smiling, tired, hatless, his blond hair in ringlets above his blue eyes.

"Hi, ma!"

"Oh, Jack, Jackie."

Tears.

"What's the matter, Ma? Hi Dad!"

"You might have given us a call."

"Oh, I would have but we got a ride practically all the way right near the campus."

"Why didn't you fly? You'd have been here this afternoon. Before the storm."

"I didn't have a dime left."

Maternal concern replaced the tears.

"Jack, I thought they lifted you out of the car. Are you all right?"

"Me? Fine, hungry."

"Someone was carrying you."

"Me?"

"Did you carry something up the walk."

"Ma, no one was carrying me."

Tears again.

"Jack, this has gone a little far. Your mother's upset. She's been standing by the window for three hours."

"Dad, no one was carrying me. I was alone."

Silence. Then:

"Well, if you must . . . a lamppost for the front walk. I bought it with my plane fare. It's a Christmas present for both of you. But I wanted to save it until Christmas . . . "

"And you carried it 300 miles in a northeast storm?"

"I told you Dad, I got a ride practically all the way."

Ten Traits of Saintliness

TESSA BIELECKI

St. Augustine prayed, "Lord, give me chastity—but not yet!" St. John of the Cross had a passion for asparagus, and Teresa of Avila gorged herself on partridge. In this captivating article, charming anecdotes about very human saints illustrate what the author calls "ten traits of Christian compassion." She has compiled her list not only from saint-watching in the annals of history, but from twenty years of personal experience as a hermit in a religious community of men and women very reminiscent themselves of the canonized saints.

The communion of saints is made up of an incredibly colorful and captivating variety of individuals, ardent scholars like Thomas Aquinas and dumbbells like John Vienny, the curé of Ars. We find cenobites like Benedict who live in community and solitairies like Antony of the Desert; kings like Louis of France, and handicaps like Herman the Cripple. We find soldiers like Joan of Arc and pacifists like Martin of Tours. There are public figures like Pope Leo the Great, who rode out single-handedly to encounter Attila the Hun and keep him from sacking Rome, and there are many hidden faces, like Saint Claire of Assisi who, after a certain point in her life, never went out of her convent cloister. There are people who were models of virtue from a very early age, such as John the Baptist, and there are such profligates as Saint Augustine, whose prayer was, "Lord, give me chastity—but not yet."

Although the saints are unique individuals, they do have certain traits in common. I have chosen ten such traits, which could be called marks of Christian compassion. First of all, we find in all the saints a heroic *fidelity to the details of ordinary life*. Although I am personally more attracted to flamboyant personalities, and the saints I will present as examples reflect this bias, I would like to begin by calling to mind all those

Mother Tessa is Co-foundress and Abbess of the Spiritual Life Institute, a contemplative order of men and women with two communities, one in the mountain-desert of Colorado, one in the woods of Nova Scotia. Retreatants usually live like the monks: staying in private hermitages, spending time in many kinds of prayer and meditation, performing chores, and taking part in liturgies and outdoor activities like jogging or canoeing. Many stay for months or years. If you would like to arrange a visit or to order publications like Desert Call, *the Colorado community's Newsletter, write to Nada Hermitage, Box 119, Crestone, CO 81131.*

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Members of the *Spiritual Life Institute*

whose lives were quiet, hidden, and unobtrusive. In essence, sanctification requires no glittering achievement and no spectacular successes—only fidelity to a hundred little things.

The second quality is *God-intoxication*, and this is also not necessarily a visible trait. Nevertheless, if you look closely, you will find that every Christian saint is madly in love with God, and is in fact becoming ever more consumed by his or her passion for God, as we see in Saint Augustine's magnificent prayer:

> You called and cried to me, you even broke open my deafness: Your beams shone on me, and You chased away my blindness: You blew on me most fragrantly and I drew in my breath and now I pant after you; I tasted you, and now hunger and thirst after you; You touched me, and I burn again to enjoy Your peace.

The saints are burning with love of God. But this love does not take place

in a vacuum, nor in abstraction. It is expressed concretely and specifically, which brings us to the third quality, the saints' *zest for life*.

Their passion for God is lived out in vitality, energy, and fecundity. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The fullness of life is what sanctification is all about. Saint Ireneus said that we glorify God most when we are fully alive. Saint Joan of Arc, for example, was crazy about her horses, and Saint Charles Boromeo was wild about chess. John of the Cross was utterly enamored of the Spanish landscape, and he also had a passion for asparagus. When he was dying, he was asked what would help alleviate his pain, and all he wanted was asparagus.

I recently read something about Saint Alphonsus Ligouri that greatly endeared him to me. He had a great love for music and the theatre. It so happened, however, that one of the performances in the Naples theatre featured a half-naked chorus line. Alphonsus felt that this was inappropriate for him, but he so wanted to hear the music that he went anyway. He sat in the back row, took off his glasses. Because he was so nearsighted he couldn't see a thing!

Teresa of Avila had a passion for absolutely everything. There wasn't anything in life that she did not enjoy. One day the sisters walked into the kitchen and found her gorging herself on partridge, and they were scandalized. She looked up, astonished that they would even question, and said with great enthusiasm, "When I pray, I pray; and when I eat partridge, I eat partridge!" Teresa's passions were so purified, refined, and unified into her one great passion for God that there was no dispersion or fragmentation.

The Celtic saints were particularly zestful—especially Brigid, who happened to love beer. She wrote this wonderful poem:

I long for a great lake of ale.
I long for the men of heaven in my house.
I long for cheerfulness in their drinking.
And I long for Jesus to be there among them.

Along with this passion for life necessarily goes *a passion for suffering and death*, particularly in the higher realms of realization. The saints suffer willingly, because they understand it as growing pains, or as labor pains. It is clear to them that death is not in opposition to life; it is an integral part of life. Saint Paul, for example, made lists of his sufferings:

he was shipwrecked, flogged, imprisoned, and so on. And yet he had a tremendous resurrection spirit. In his letter to the Corinthians he says, "We are . . . always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."

When Ignatius of Antioch, one of the earliest of the Christian martyrs, was condemned to be fed to the lions in the Colosseum, he responded to his disciples, who were of course intent on rescuing him, with long letters that begged them to stop their efforts, saying, "Do not hinder me, and show me no false kindness. Let me be the food of these wild beasts, for they shall bring me to God." And of course, when he says "to God" he means that they shall bring him into the fullness of his realized being. For the Christian saints, death is ultimately a love-act, the consummation of a love affair, and they speak tenderly and lovingly about embracing the cross.

The fifth quality of the Christian saint is *a passion for people*. "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 14:35). There is an extravagance to the compassion that the saints manifest: they squander themselves for God and for the people of God. John of the Cross' advice is, "Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love." Saint Therese of Lisieux singled out the most unloved and unattractive sister, for whom she felt a natural antipathy, and she loved her with such compassionate effort that the nuns believed she was Therese's best friend.

This sanctified self-giving can either be simple or it can be spectacular. It can be the humble gesture of Saint Pius the Tenth, who gave his last pair of socks to a poor beggar. Or it can be the dramatic activity of Princess Elizabeth of Hungary, who opened up the doors of her palace and fed all the poor, and on her wedding night put a leper in her wedding bed. Father Maximillian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest, exchanged his life for another prisoner's in Auschwitz. Father Kolbe took the place of a man who had been singled out to be executed, and he subsequently starved to death in solitary confinement. When Catherine of Siena heard about a political prisoner who had been sentenced to die, she went to visit him. She took him in her arms and she could feel his fear within her. She was so identified with his suffering that she felt it in her own body as well. I was thrilled to hear Father Timko speak recently about the "visceral dimension" of compassion. Because when you are really experiencing another human being's suffering, you don't feel it merely with calm.

The saint's passion for people manifests itself not only in action, but also in *contemplation or stillness*. The scriptures are full of allusions to the mysterious disappearance of Christ, who regularly retreated into the hills to be silent. If you look at a photograph of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, you recognize the source of the dynamism for her heroic charity. It is not the product of a lavish funding and influential friends; it comes from her prayer. According to her own direction, the more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life. Mother Teresa gets up to pray every morning at 4:30, no matter where she is in the world, or what time she went to bed the night before.

In other words, the Christian saints are not only passionately engaged with people, they also exhibit a "holy indifference." They have learned, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "not only to care, but also not to care." They begin by just being there, open and available. And then, out of their stillness, they are sent out. The word "apostle" actually means "one who is sent." The terrible problem for many apostles today is that they have not really been sent. Therefore they are not true apostles who are spirit-led; they are self-propelled. So compassion is first and foremost a mode of being. It is an extravagance of being which overflows into doing. Louis Lallemont concluded that if you rush headlong into action without first finding the power, vision, and wisdom of discrimination in your prayer, you will do little more than nothing.

The seventh quality of sainthood is *balance* between polarities. For some action may predominate, for others contemplation, but there is always the tension of trying to hold the tension of balance.

The next mark of sanctity is *human frailty*. This is important to remember, because the statues and stories of the saints tend to gloss over the real human beings and give us a terribly wrong impression, leading us to think that the saints are all stuffed-shirts. In fact that is not at all the case. The saints are thoroughly human and completely natural—which means that they are also imperfect. For example, Saint Augustine was given to rages, and little Saint Therese of Lisieux suffered incredibly from bouts of depression. Saint Vincent de Paul, who was so heroically generous, was actually a bilious character subject to fits of anger. Saint Jerome was insulting to his theological opponents and known to attack not only their arguments, but also their persons. Saint Francis suffered throughout his life over his chastity. One day he was seen building a family out of snow: a mother, a father, and a child. When asked what he was doing, he said "I may father a child yet."

The secret of realization in all these people is that they never gave up struggling and working on their human weaknesses. They knew that what counts is not triumphant victory but endless persevering effort. Teresa of Avila said that we should strive and strive and strive, for we were meant for nothing else. Saint Paul said in one of his letters, "To keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh . . . For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Because of the imagery of Saint Paul, we often refer to our imperfections as "thorns in the flesh." In fact, it is these very flaws that make our favorite saints saints.

Another characteristic related to imperfection is *bounce*. As we say in my community, "It's the bounce that counts." Whenever the saints fail, whenever they fall, they pick themselves up and keep going. Saint Peter is the perfect example of this. He bumbles all the way through the scriptures until the biggest bumble of all, which is of course his betrayal of Jesus. The third time the cock crows, Peter remembers Jesus' prophecy, and he fills with remorse. What happens next is one of the most wrenching passages in all of scripture: "And Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). But after the bitterness came the bounce. He became one of the greatest of the disciples—in fact the one upon whom the church is built—simply because in addition to being the biggest bumbler, he had the best bounce.

This brings us to the last of the ten characteristics of the realized Christian, which is *hilarity*. I am not just referring to a quiet kind of joy: I mean an uproarious hilarity which wells up out of the depths of stillness. Hilarity makes it possible for the saints to exhibit bounce in the midst of frailty. It is why it is possible for the Christian saint to face suffering and death in his own life and in the world around him. As Francis de Sales said, a sad saint is a sorry saint. Philip Neri used as a football the red biretta that the Pope had sent him as a sign of prestige and privilege. When Saint Simeon came into the city after spending forty years fasting and praying in the desert, it was Good Friday, the most solemn day in the church year. What did Saint Simeon do? He ate sausages and danced with the harlots! As Nikos Kazantzakis so aptly said, "every one of us needs a little madness in order to cut the rope and be free."

There is an old Hassidic story about a rabbi who used to go to the marketplace to meet the prophet Elijah. They would talk together about

who was living the life of God. On one particular day, the rabbi asked Elijah, "Well, is there anyone here who is on the way? Is there anyone here who has really awakened?" Elijah looked around and pointed to two men in one corner and said, "Those two." Immediately the rabbi went over and asked, "What is your occupation?" "We are clowns," they said. "When we see people who are depressed, we cheer them up."

If ever our world needed jesters, it is now. We have forgotten how to relax, how to laugh, how to play. We have forgotten how to be. In our world today, laughter can be a sign of deep faith, deep love, and deep hope. It may be our highest manifestation of compassion.

These ten qualities are not only a description of Christian saints; they also give us an outline of how we can cultivate "saintly" compassion in our own lives. So, in conclusion, I will simply shift them a little, to give you ten practical guidelines. First, work diligently with the ordinariness of your day-to-day existence. Second, love God. Third as Brother David Steindl-Rast says, be grateful for everything. Fourth, embrace every small suffering and every small death that comes your way. If you do that every day, you will be ready for the bigger challenges later on. Next, love one another. And then, when you are called upon to express that love in some kind of action, do it—appropriately and generously. Sixth, sit still and empty yourself for some part of each day. It doesn't matter whether you practice Buddhist meditation or Christian prayer: just do some kind of sitting with great fidelity and regularity. Seventh, keep your balance. And then, eighth, work perseveringly and creatively with your human weaknesses. Ninth, remember to bounce right back immediately after each fall. And lastly, laugh! No matter what happens, keep your sense of humor and keep on laughing, especially at yourself. We must take God alone so seriously that we take everything else—including ourselves—light-heartedly.

Woman's Spirituality

NANCY BLAIR

Woman's spirituality is a way of being. It is a spiritual practice connected to the ever changing seasons of the earth and the dynamic cycles of our sensual bodies. It is an active participation in the celebration of life on a living planet. The way of woman's spirituality is trusting and loving our whole selves: our minds, emotions, body wisdom, our voices and our psychic intuitions. It is reclaiming the totality of our spiritual heritage, our ancient matristic myths and divine images of woman power.

The way of woman's spirituality is creating meaningful ritual, empowering ourselves with song and dance, reclaiming our imaginations and inspirations. It is the practice of cultivating healing thoughts, words and actions about ourselves; healing and nurturing our lives. For women, it is a journey toward wholeness and holiness, gently healing our psyches and dreams, embracing the sacred Wise Woman Goddess within. It is the great round journey of awakening self-love.

Woman's spirituality is a practice. And it is not easy. The everyday practice of loving self is a difficult, courageous, political act in the face of patriarchal oppression, fragmentation and exploitation. But awakening the power of self-love wakes up the Goddess within, and when the divine feminine energy sparks her flow through our cells all hell breaks loose. In ancient myth, the Goddess is said to spring forth from chaos. And in our own internal chaos, dis-enchantment and disease; from our own "homesickness" and internalized police patrol, the Goddess within percolates up from an ancient well-spring that bubbles and oozes and like a river comes flooding, soothing and quenching parched and thirsty ground. And it is from this rich mud where our seeds can germinate, where our living can begin. Surrendering to the Goddess within is experience grounded in self-love.

And how do we even begin to know the Wise Woman Goddess within

Nancy Blair, an artist in New Brunswick, NJ, teaches at Rutgers University. She gives workshops and lectures on woman's spirituality, healing, and the creative process, and is co-owner of StarRiver, which produces ancient goddess sculptures and other museum quality works of art.

in a constructed system built on dualism, hierarchy, mysogyny and disconnectedness. How do we begin to make way for a language of self love when the same old tape runs the same old message: "I'm not good enough, smart enough, beautiful enough, thin enough, rich enough." (And you fill in the blank.)

The journey to the Wise Woman Goddess within is a practice in exorcising the internalized and insidious police state from our heads, hearts and homes. It is the task of letting go of the unkind judgments and goadings of the self-hating voices in our heads. It is these voices, internal and not so internal, that block the divine, wise whisperings of the Great Goddess within.

The magic of woman's spirituality is the magic of letting go and the magic of surrendering to the sacredness of being . . . a magical kind of everyday re-minding and re-membering. The magic is in the process of envisioning with all our might, dancing up a trance, singing out loud, voicing our concerns, dreaming our passions awake and transforming our anger. It is the magic of honoring and celebrating divinity from the inside out . . . knowing and trusting the miracle of life.

The practice of woman's spirituality is a decision to love and accept ourselves no matter what. It is the most powerful non-violent resistance to patriarchy that any one can embrace. It is the magical point of transformation in our lives. And most importantly, the practice of woman's spirituality asks us to "walk our talk." Can we practice in our lives what the Wise Woman Goddess whispers from our hearts?

The way of woman's spirituality is trusting and loving our whole selves: our minds, emotions, body wisdom, our voices and our psychic intuitions. It is reclaiming the totality of our spiritual heritage, our ancient matristic myths and divine images of woman power.

Lay Zen Practice: Implications for Westerners

MANFRED STEGER

The following talk, sponsored by Fellowship in Prayer and the Zen Studies Society of Princeton, was given in the East Asian Studies Department of Princeton University on May 20, 1988. The speaker is a student of Aitken Roshi, Abbot of the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu, Hawaii. Introducing the speaker, F.I.P. President Paul Walsh noted Aitken Roshi's commitment to social transformation. "Social action, in deeds as well as words," Walsh said, "is a crucial expression of the Mahayana spirit in a world where the passions of greed, hatred, and ignorance fuel our industrial and political systems and threaten the very structure of life."

One expression of Aitken Roshi's spirit of social concern is the Journal of Women and Zen, *published by the Diamond Sangha in recognition of the fact that fifty percent of American Buddhist practitioners, and a growing number of teachers and roshis, are women.*

There are many different things that one associates on hearing the word "Zen" here in the West: "Zen in the martial arts," "Zen in the art of seeing," "Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance," "Zen and business," "Zen for achieving peace of mind," "Enlightenment," and "Aesthetics and Zen" are only a few of the possible associations that might pop up immediately. The last twenty years saw a Zen flood sweeping over the West, clothed in many different garments—sometimes as a means of making money and participating in the "New Age" movement, sometimes as a sincere attempt to establish an ancient practice that would give answers to us westerners, answers to questions that are as old as humankind.

But what does Zen really mean for us, children of the late twentieth-century, born in a part of the world where Buddhism and meditation are still regarded as "exotic" Asian products? Can Zen practice be helpful for a housewife in Virginia? Or for a stockbroker in New York? Or for an army officer in Hawaii? This question can only be answered on an individual basis. It depends entirely on whether or not the individual is wrestling with one of the old questions, which though they might assume different tones or colors for different individuals, always concern themselves with the same issues: namely suffering, unrest, impermanence and

death. The Buddha referred to these aspects of the human condition as *Dukkha*, which can be translated as "anguish." And he went on to find an answer to questions born of the anguish, questions like, "Who am I?" "Why do I have to die?" "What is the purpose of living?"

Being hit by these questions is the inevitable beginning of an individual journey, an attempt to alleviate the pain of suffering and dissatisfaction. This could be the point where Zen practice can be helpful in guiding the seeker toward a solution to these pressing questions. The goal of Zen practice, if we can talk in terms of a "goal," is to find peace of mind and an end to suffering. Yamada Koun Roshi, the head of the "Sanbo Kyodan" lay Zen lineage in Japan, said, "The goal of Zen practice is the realization of one's essential nature and an ongoing application of this realization in one's daily life." Another Zen teacher, Soyen Shaku Zenji, said, "The aim of Zen practice, to state it briefly, is to dispel the clouds of ignorance and to make shine the sun of realization. We are selfish, because we are ignorant as to the nature of self."

So the core of Zen practice, whether for laypersons or not, is always the application of the message at the heart of Buddhism which points to the non-abiding character of an "I," the finding of myself as You and the finding of You as myself. This is what we have to experience. By realizing the limitations of dualism, we have to transcend dualism, but without neglecting the fact of dualism. This may sound complicated, but the fact is that which happens all the time in our lives. We just don't realize that the solutions to our burning questions appear as the fact right here and now.

The fact is that everything is dependent, everyone is dependent on everyone else, and everything is reflected in everything else. The metaphor for this in the Chinese school of Buddhism known as Hua Yen is the great net of Indra, a net of perfect diamonds, where every individual gem perfectly reflects all the others. So, in finding ourselves as the birdsong, as the noise of the airplane passing, or as the scolding neighbor, we live in accord with what is going on right here and now, without the burning wound of a "separate I" which demands always to be satisfied, not realizing the already inherent satisfaction of this moment as this moment.

We come to see that only this realization can give us peace of mind, and, as Soyen Shaku Zenji said, can lead us back to our long lost home.

Since we are not hermits who isolate themselves and devote all their

Tom Dunham

time to meditation, we must learn to give time to our meditation. This can begin with just sitting ten minutes every day, and can eventually increase to an hour daily. Individual sitting must be combined with finding a good Zen teacher and participating once or twice a year in retreats lasting from two to seven days. It is important to give time to our practice, even though it's sometimes tough to sit for an hour instead of watching "Miami Vice" on T.V. But that is the constant challenge of a lay practitioner—to live within family and profession and to set aside time for the practice.

We are living in a world full of responsibilities for family, profession, ecology, peace, and social justice. It is hard to leave everything behind and to disappear in a monastery in Japan or a cave in Tibet, especially when one is not young any longer, and responsibilities for supporting children take precedence. So rather than finding seclusion, it is our lifelong task as lay Zen practitioners to practice authentic Zen in the context of our daily life. The question is the same for a New York stockbroker as

it was for a Chinese monk in the T'ang period. How do I practice right here and now, within my environment? Lay practice in the West is an experiment, rooted in the same Asian monastic tradition that provided the framework for the T'ang hermit, but transplanted into new soil and thus different in appearance—though the same in essence. European potatoes look and taste different from South American potatoes, which again are different from Asian potatoes; but potatoes are always potatoes.

The lay experiment of western practice is in full flower at the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii, under the leadership of my teacher, Robert Aitken Roshi. Aitken Roshi's first introduction to Zen came when he was imprisoned in an internment camp in Japan during the Second World War. After making several training visits to Japanese Zen monasteries when the war had ended in 1959, he founded the "Diamond Sangha," a lay Buddhist society in Honolulu. The Diamond Sangha is affiliated with the "order of the Three Treasures" in Kamakura, Japan. During the sixties, the Koko An Zendo of the Diamond Sangha served as a training center for westerners and saw visits of notable Zen teachers like Soen Nakagawa Roshi, Hakuun Yasutani Toshi, and Dr. D. T. Suzuki. Robert Aitken Roshi's concern for peace and social justice was especially conspicuous during the Vietnam War, when he engaged in a variety of antiwar activities. During the seventies, especially since 1974, Aitken Roshi has been developing a particular Zen practice for westerners, something very special and probably unique to the West.

Without abandoning important traditional "pillars" of our practice, like zazen (sitting meditation), dokusan (personal interviews), teisho (formal lecture), and koan study, he has been able to encompass all aspects of a layperson's daily life in his teachings and their setting. Publications like "Blind Donkey" and "Kahawai," cooperation with organizations like the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the American Friends Service Committee witness a strong engagement in questions relating to peace, ecology, feminism, and social justice. Retreats almost every month, daily sitting meditation and formal interviews twice a week illustrate the Sangha's sincerity and effort in maintaining a strong traditional meditative practice suited to the realities of lay life. Affiliated centers in California, Arizona, Argentina and Australia maintain an active connection with the Diamond Sangha's Hawaii headquarters, providing a lively flow of visitors, residents, and sesshin participants. Aitken Roshi's books

Barry H. Westgate

and writings have encouraged a large network of correspondents and students to undertake Zen practice in the varied context of their daily lives and occupations.

Aitken Roshi was once asked, "If we are already perfect in this very moment, why do we have to sit zazen?"

Roshi answered, "You don't have to! The question is: Are you satisfied? Are your questions answered?"

And that is the point. As long as we don't realize that we are sleeping on a pouch of gold, we can't make use of the gold. As long as we don't realize that we are already released, we can't find peace of mind. We laypersons of the West must find our own way of practicing the Way, shown and taught by the Buddha, and by all the succeeding teachers of our lineage. This is not an easy task, and it cannot be done within only a few years. But we are all responsible to contribute, as well as we can, to fulfilling the Bodhisattva's Vow here in the West as well as everywhere:

Though the many beings are numberless, I vow to save them.
Though greed, hatred, and ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to cut them off.
Though the Dharma is vast and fathomless, I vow to understand it.
Though Buddha's Way is beyond attainment, I vow to embody it fully.

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These responses to the question, "Why do you read *Fellowship In Prayer*?" in our Readership Survey are typical of the vast number of answers received. Thank you! Clearly readers find that "Fellowship In Prayer" is a rich source of spiritual nourishment in a world that more than ever needs the power of prayer and meditation.

from a letter by Paul Walsh, F.I.P. President

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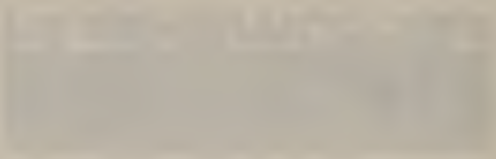


Where is God?

JAN BRESKY

Poor Jacob.

He had just stolen his brother's birthright. He had just tricked his father Isaac. Now he had to flee for his life. Night was falling. He came upon an empty valley. No place to lodge. He lay in the open field, troubled and desperate. A stone his only pillow.

He closed his eyes. He saw angels of God ascending and descending a ladder. The base of the ladder was in the ground. Its top reached the very heights of heaven. God spoke to him. "Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth. . . . All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants." (Genesis 28:14)

Jacob awoke suddenly. Here in this humble valley, this desolate place, here God was revealed. Jacob was awed. "Surely God is present in this place and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God and that is the gateway to heaven." (Genesis 28:16-17)

Where is God?

Anywhere where we need.

Anytime that we hurt.

Any place that God is called upon in truth and serenity.

When you awake in the morning—God is there. When you are home with your family—God is there. In depression, and in exultation, in times of trouble and in immense joy—God is there.

Wherever we go God is there if we would but acknowledge God's presence.

I have prayed in synagogues, parks, the beach, the Grand Canyon, New York subways, Maine fishing boats, Hollywood studios, Minnesota hotels and Florida hospitals and always—God was there.

Since God is everywhere, my religion, like that of my ancestors, is portable. Everywhere I go, I find God. Everywhere I go, God is with me. I know this because God is in my heart and my soul and I never leave home without my soul.

We have an incredibly wrong notion that God can only be found in a synagogue, or a church, in a chapel or in a sanctuary with stained glass windows. Honestly, I have often felt less of God's presence in such places.

Rabbi Bresky

Where did God address Moses? In a large sanctuary? In a stained glass cathedral? No. On the top of a deserted mountain, speaking from a lowly bush.

Why?

To teach us that God can be found, in any place and at any time.

How is God to be found?

Prayer.

Prayer is "the gateway to heaven." Again, you do not need formal services. You do not need prayer books. You do not need ritual.

Cry out to God—and you will be heard.

Cry out to God—and you will be helped.

Cry out to God—and you will be healed.

Healed? "Well, you know God, Rabbi—and you look pretty pale to me."

I have never been more whole than I am now. I have never been more happy than I am now. It is because I have never been as close to the Holy One, as I am now.

Life can be a terrible struggle. Family tensions. Financial pressures. Physical stress. Emotional worry. Going to synagogue or sanctuary once a month or even once a week is just not enough. You need God every day, every moment. To pray every day, even just for 10 minutes is essential.

And God is there, even in the desolate valleys, where there is a stone for a pillow.

I think a lot about you.

I worry a great deal about your spiritual well being.

But I can't reach out to you every moment you need guidance, inspiration or a loving hand. But God can.

God can.

And when God does, when God answers you, no matter where you are, you will declare as did Jacob. "How awesome is this place. God was here and I didn't know it. This is no other than an abode of God and the gateway to heaven."

Sounds from Another Realm

TRAVIS DUPRIEST

The sounds of the monastery are loud. Loud, because so much silence surrounds them: these sounds are set off, as though they were pieces of art in a museum—each special, each to be visited and understood on its own terms. Each to be respected as an individual creation, yet each coming from a past and maybe heading towards a future.

The first real sound I heard here was the heating system in my cell. When the heat comes on, you know it. I get the picture of one of those Renaissance maps with Zephyer puffing out his cheeks blowing the wind from his mouth as hard as he can. As soon as the heating system quiets, you hear the buzz of the flourescent ceiling light; it goes on and on, and eventually becomes a part of the permanent background noise that contributes to the silence.

Many things here "contribute" to the silence. Ever notice how much quieter a cat makes a room? When it's not howling. A cat slowly walking through a room somehow adds to the silence. Just light candles in a chapel or a dining room; the burning and flickering make the space more silent, more meditative.

Even the sounds: the purring of a cat quietens a living room on a Sunday afternoon as the newspaper slowly stacks itself in shuffled sections on the floor. As the occasional crackle of a candle wick or piece of dust passing through the wick's flame will add to the awesome silence of a burning candle. So the sounds of the monastery contribute to the great silence.

The recurring sounds are the bells calling the brothers to prayer, the Abbot's knock for the office to begin, the voices either saying or chanting the psalms appointed for the particular hour of that particular day, the angelus singing three times at the close of Lauds, the reading during meals, the tinsel ring of the dinner bell to end the reading, and perhaps a muffled conversation from some unseen background as two brothers laugh or cough.

That's about all. Sounds of beauty and order and purpose. Sounds of entreaty, recitation, praise, instruction, and structure. Human voices and bells. Is there any human sound more melodious and engaging than

plain song? Is there any mechanical sound more ethereal and haunting than a bell?

One day, though, I heard another sound. Alone, in my cell, the heat off, the overhead light off, sitting in my chair writing, I heard geese.

Outside, overhead. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of geese flying low enough to really make a racket. Flying back to northern Michigan, or maybe Canada. I put down my pen and listened.

Scores of screeching-honks, high and low, long and short. One after the other. Several at one time. A kind of natural symphony; a cacophony, yes, but rhythmical. Not Mozart's ordered beats, but not John Cage's disorder either.

Funny how the sounds from another realm throw you off balance. The sounds of the forest, or jungle, or sea, or sky are truly foreign to us.

They are like the faces of the inhabitants of a foreign country: the visitor is either taken aback at the differences or is overcome by the beauty. But in either case, the strangeness, the foreignness, makes discernment difficult. You have to live in another culture for awhile before sorting out the prince from the pauper.

How easy, I thought, to impose a human standard on another realm. How easy to assume that the geese honk in utter abandon, in random purposeless sounds, creating a chaotic mix of sound.

No doubt that is what they would think, if they could, of our sounds, of the sounds of the monastery. Their sounds, different to my ears though they are, are the sounds of order and purpose to them.

And no doubt, could we enter their realm of weightlessness and perspective, would we hear their sounds too as hymns of praise and prayer.

"Of all things, Lord, creative force,
Pervasive yet unmoving source."
—*Hymn for None.*

Space Journey

SHIVA KUMARI

Frosty Autumn morning; warm cup of coffee in hand; just thinking. Why is it, I wondered, that I seem to relate to God differently than others? For me, God is so alive, so much a part of every breath, so far beyond definition that definition no longer seems necessary.

I sipped the warm coffee, looked at the radiance of the sun on the green plants, the birds singing in the aviary, and thanked God I was a hermit. How good it was to be alone. In this solitude there were no arguments about God. There were no neat compartments to stuff God into and then go to war with others over whose compartmentalization represented the Truth. God was just present, alive, breathing in every ray of sunshine that played upon the waters of peace as they flowed within me.

Then it suddenly occurred to me why the leap in awareness between talking "about" God and living "in" God was so very near and yet so difficult to get at. It is as simple as the difference in our awareness between space and matter.

Even at this moment as you read these words, your attention is focused on matter, the paper and the print on the paper. But your brain does not register the space that the light went through in order to make it possible for you to read these words.

If we look at the macrocosm, there is far more space than matter. But when we contemplate the immensity of the universe, we usually do so in terms of what is occupying all the space and not the space itself.

Let us then turn to the microcosm. Matter is composed of atoms and atoms are mostly space. An atom has a proton nucleus around which are orbiting electrons. The actual matter contained in both protons and electrons is extremely small, whereas the space contained in an atom is quite extensive in contrast to the amount of matter.

Therefore, if you look around yourself at all the matter that made you

Shiva Kumari, who was given her name by her Guru when she received diksha *(initiation) in Raja and Kundalini yoga, underwent ten years of intensive training in Hinduism and Buddhism. In 1984, twelve years after converting to Roman Catholicism, she pronounced vows as a Catholic hermit nun. Today Sr. Kumari lives in solitude in New York, using her Eastern training to deepen her Christian contemplative practice.*

Paul M. Schrock

feel so secure because of its solidity, it is an uneasy thought to suddenly realize that you had been made to feel secure by an illusion. If all the matter around you is really more space than matter, then solidity is an illusion. Yes? While matter is real, the greater reality is space. But you don't think of yourself as living in space. You think of your feet being firmly planted on good old terra firma.

Now what, you might ask, does all this have to do with God? The analogy I'm attempting to create is one which points out the degree to which our minds are trained to be aware of matter rather than the space which is both within it and around it. Similarly, we are conditioned to view "life" as that which one can see with the physical eyes rather than

the Divinity which is both in and around it. Without God, all life would collapse just as without space, all matter would collapse.

The awareness that space predominates rather than matter is analogous to the awareness that God predominates rather than the world we are so used to viewing as reality. Once one makes that quantum leap in consciousness, there comes the almost humorous realization that it was all so close at hand, all so obvious that one wonders why one never noticed it before.

Sermon on the Mount of Intrareligious Dialogue

RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR

When you enter into an intrareligious dialogue, do not think beforehand what you have to believe.

When you *witness* to your faith, do not defend yourself or your vested interests, sacred as they may appear to you. Do like the birds in the skies: they sing and fly and do not defend their music or their beauty.

When you dialogue with somebody, look at your partner as a revelatory experience as you would—and should—look at the lilies in the fields.

When you engage in intrareligious dialogue, try first to remove the beam in your own eye before removing the speck in the eye of your neighbor.

Blessed are you when you do not feel self-sufficient while being in dialogue.

Blessed are you when you trust the other because you trust in Me.

Blessed are you when you face misunderstandings from your own community or others for the sake of your fidelity to Truth.

Blessed are you when you do not give up your convictions, and yet you do not set them up as absolute norms.

Woe unto you, you theologians and academicians, when you dismiss what others say because you find it embarrassing or not sufficiently learned.

Woe unto you, you practitioners of religions, when you do not listen to the cries of the little ones.

Woe unto you, you religious authorities, because you prevent change and (re)conversion.

Woe unto you, religious people, because you monopolize religion and stifle the Spirit which blows where and how She wills.

Prayer for One Who is Going Deaf

O God
The trouble about being deaf is that most people
find deaf people just a nuisance.
They sympathize with people
who are blind and lame;
but they are irritated and annoyed
with people who are deaf.
And the result is
that deaf people are apt to avoid company,
and so get more and more lonely,
and more and more shut in.
Help me now that my hearing has begun to go.
Help me
to face the situation
and to realise that there is no good trying to hide it,
for that will only make it worse and worse.
Help me
to be grateful for all that can be done
for deaf people like me.
If I have got to wear a hearing-aid,
help me to do it quite naturally,
and not to be shy or embarrassed about it.
Give me the perseverance
not to let this trouble get me down,
and not to let it cut me off from others.
And help me to remember
that, whatever happens,
there is nothing can stop me from hearing your voice.
William Barclay

These prayers were submitted by Carl J. C. Wolf of Findlay, OH
Please send your favorite prayer typed, double spaced to the Editor, Fellowship In Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

Aging

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will someday be old.

Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject and every occasion.

Release me from the craving to try and straighten out everybody's affairs.

Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful but not forward. Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends in the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details—give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips to my aches and pains—they are increasing, and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains. Help me to endure them with patience.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint—some of them are so hard to live with, but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Help me to extract all possible fun out of life. There are so many funny things around us, and I don't want to miss any of them.

A Roman Catholic Nun

A Prayer for Neighbors

As the years increase, O Lord, I become ever more aware of all the people who have touched my life and who now surround me. I recognize that this is your voice, calling me to remember that no one of us can walk through this world alone.

Forgive me if I have thought too much about my own feelings; or have noticed only my own needs; or have craved too much attention. Forgive me for being unmindful of others. Help me to understand other people's feelings as I think I understand my own.

Down in my heart I know there are opportunities to reach out a hand toward neighbors, and to offer some of the strength which you have

granted me. Give me the tact to meet them in a calm manner and with the right spirit. Open my eyes to see the things we have in common and which can be shared. Allow me, as well, to appreciate their frustrations and disappointments, and to sympathize. Please supply me with an extra measure of patience to listen again to a familiar story which I have heard several times before today.

You have kept your promises to me, good Lord, and have provided many blessings. Your constant care has more than supplied my needs. Help me to be at peace with myself, and with the people immediately around me, and with you. May I practice that peace faithfully in the spirit of Jesus. Amen

Carl J. C. Wolf

A Prayer for Friends

"O God, we who are bound together in the tender ties of love, pray thee for a day of unclouded love. May no passing irritation rob us of our joy in one another. Forgive us if we have often been keen to see the human failings, and slow to feel the preciousness of those who are still the dearest comfort of our life. May there be no sharp words that wound and scar, and no rift that may grow into estrangement. Suffer us not to grieve those whom thou hast sent to us as the sweet ministers of love. May our eyes not be so holden by selfishness that we know thine angels only when they spread their wings to return to thee. Amen."

Walter Rauschenbusch

Life Without TV, Stereos, and Weekend Trips

BROOKE MURPHY

I once heard a photographer say that we see what we want to see. Last summer I went on my second trip to the Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky with my church's youth group. I saw things that were painful, and it was hard to discover that they exist in the U.S., a country that prides itself on its wealth.

We left Princeton for two weeks in June to renovate poor people's

Brooke Murphy

Brooke Murphy, a student at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, has made several trips to Appalachia and Haiti.

Brooke Murphy

houses, to see another part of the country, and to learn how others live. We all arrived with attitudes of superiority, sympathy and curiosity, which were immediately challenged by our naivete and horror at such poverty.

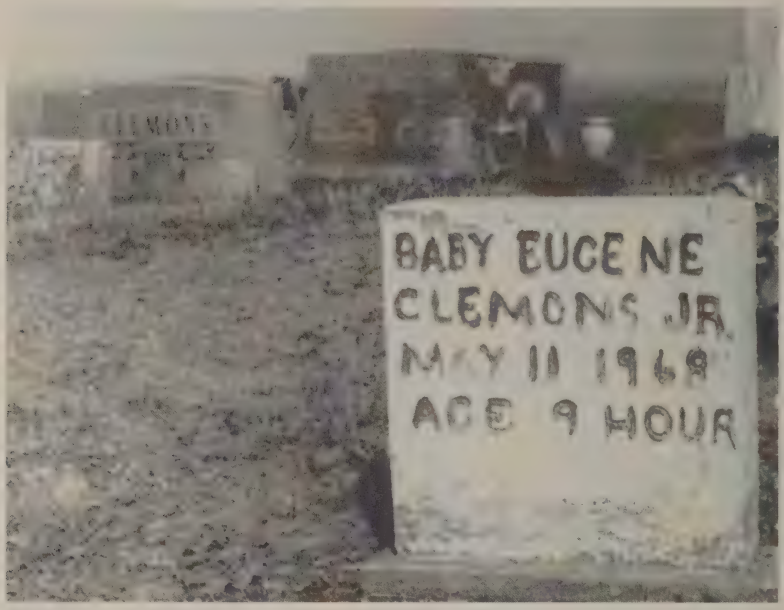
Our group was working mostly for coal mining families. Since the local mines have been closed for years, these families are left unemployed, as well as uneducated and isolated. The towns appeared to exist in a time warp. "How could such simple and deprived living exist in the 80's so close to our homes?" I wondered.

When we arrived at our first workplace the screen door slammed open, and as we climbed out of the pick-up truck a woman moved out onto the porch, shyly smiling. This was Janie, the mother of two, married at 15, divorced and remarried by 21, now 30. Homemade wine, pickled hot dogs in a jar (for the months when the electricity is turned off), tuna cans, rolled balls of clothes, an old Bible with the cover torn off and more junk than a flea market has was strewn about the shabby porch. We

Brooke Murphy

learned from Janie that it was common for Appalachian women to be married at 14 or 15.

Confronted with such poverty, I developed broader values and ended up admiring these people. I began to question myself. Could I be occupied with Bible belt education, without a t.v., stereos, stores or weekend trips into the city? Not only do they occupy themselves but they truly have a love for their life and for each other. They seem to realize that the



Brooke Murphy

rich exist, but they appear to have no urge to move on to the bigger and better; to the new and improved.

These people were accepting, loving and unquestioning. When I left, my first impression of fear had been replaced by appreciation, even a touch of envy. Appalachia's a place where families aren't dispersed from one coast of the U.S. to the other. Two children that we met, Bubby and Melody live "just a holler down" from their great grandma. Their slower pace of life is generated on their front porches, where they spend hours. It is not merely a place of relaxation, but a vision of the past, of genuine and sincerely warm people, of dusty dirt roads leading to well-loved homes, and of mountains silently overlooking them. My initial sympathy had now become caring. I even learned to appreciate my home tremendously and to respect other's ways of living as well as my own.

Learning to See

WAYNE SIMSIC

We welcome your account of your own "Transforming Experience" (a spiritual experience that had an outcome for the good of an individual, group, or institution). Please send it (typed and double spaced) to The Editor, Fellowship In Prayer, *291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton NJ 08542. Include a brief biography.*

About a year ago, I was camped in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania eating breakfast. After breakfast I retrieved water from the creek to wash a pot. As I leaned over to draw the water my attention riveted on points of sunlight dancing on the creek. The light mesmerized me and I let my whole attention focus on it. Suddenly, the landscape began to change. Water, trees, rocks, and earth drew near, so near that I felt the surface of a large boulder on the opposite side of the creek as if it were next to my skin. The surface felt porous and smooth; at the same time, it was translucent, a physical presence that acted as an aperture into something hidden.

I stood in a daze. The whole place shimmered with a radiance I had not seen before. What joy! I felt the intimate presence of things and intuited with certainty that all nature was loved and cared for. I was also aware of the love that pulsed at the center of my being; it was suddenly more real than ever before. I was overwhelmed by the realization of how dependent I was on this love and how near it was to my life. A deep sense of humility filled my heart, and I was overcome by the need to bow low before the mystery of nature and the sacredness of my own being.

The joy reached a crescendo and suddenly abated. The awareness of mystery and love was replaced by the sense of a threatening abyss. My life felt as if it were on the edge of the abyss and could be lost at any moment; nature itself seemed fragile and derelict; emptiness overwhelmed the entire event. Slowly, though, the abyss receded. I was left

Wayne Simsic is a teacher in Mentor, Ohio, who writes on the relationship between nature and prayer. He spends his leisure hours backpacking to enjoy the silence and solitude of the desert, forest, and mountains.

shaken but with a deep reassurance that as fragile and dependent as all being was it would still be held in existence by love.

After a time (I am not sure how long a time it was), the landscape withdrew and knitted itself tight. Water, rocks, trees and earth collected themselves as if someone were rearranging stage scenery. The landscape that remained had all the familiar distances. The sound of rushing water, in particular, was so clear and intense that it seemed removed from the senses. All things returned to concealment. The points of light continued to dance but there was no longer any depth; the rhythm had vanished. The only song that remained was the one still singing in my heart.

Long after the emotion had waned and I had left the forest I realized that I could no longer be content with ordinary seeing in which I took my life for granted. My sight had been changed and so had my heart. I wanted to celebrate nature, to address all things in a way that I had not done before—from the depths of my being—and I wanted to celebrate the mystery of a call, a call to transform my life in love. I realized, too, that I no longer had to search for a vision of home but that I was already home and had not known it. Mystery was nearer to my life than I had thought: my entire life was immersed in it.

Nightscapes: Reflections of an Inner-city Contemplative

Late at night
I've come to be with You,
To sit with You awhile—
You and the silence.
The night sky reminds me
Of other times, other fantasies.
The high white moon
Shines through the black branches
Of the tall evergreen,
And lamplight glimmers high
In all the apartments.
How emptied I am now;
How open.
How in tune,
At-one-with-You.
No one else.
At long last, no one else.

Jane Higgins, R.S.M.

Isaiah 61.10: As a Bride Adorned

Let not the noise of earth's Jerusalem
break on the stillness of the Upper Room
where Mary weaves the mystic wedding gown
of longing prayer—her heart both thread
and loom,
She is the heavenly Jerusalem,
She has become the land of all desire,
God's bride-soul, waiting for Descending Love
to seal His beauty in her by His fire.

Catherine Carney, R.C.

Rising

I saw the action of my life
as a tiny yeast, rising
breathing hope to dense humanity

Humble and unseen,
my breath makes pockets in the gluten of this loaf.
It multiplies, stretches further still
the skin of possibility.

All of us together, breathing,
rising
heedless of the mass we work within,
rising the loaf,
filling the mountains with hope.

God, when the firing time is nigh,
and we flee, invisible, rising
up to thee,
may our work be perfect in thy sight,
may it nourish all humanity.

Gail Griffith Murray

Report

God is not dead. He,
like some people everywhere,
has not been employed.

William Walter De Bolt

Keeping Christmas

ALICE C. MANSFIELD

I will honor Christmas in my heart
and will try to keep it all the year.
Charles Dickens

As Advent begins, I look among the people of Christmas for inspiration and models. They were closest to Jesus at his coming into the world, and we share together the common bond of our humanity and our fervent longing to have it redeemed. These men and women are marvelous comrades as we resume the yearly inner journey from Christmas to Calvary and beyond. It is in their company I will strive to keep Christmas throughout the coming year.

With *MARY*, I will surrender in faith to the birthing of God within me, patient with the rhythm of my growth.

With *JOSEPH*, I will be attentive to my dreams, hopes and aspirations. I will listen courageously to them and respond wholeheartedly, trusting that the God who speaks to me in these human ways will give me the means to accomplish God's will.

With the *ANGELS*, I will be a herald of good news and a messenger of peace as I make the rounds of my daily life.

With the *SHEPHERDS*, I will be open to God's presence in my ordinary, everyday life. I will "hold every moment sacred" as I continually discover anew the myriad and marvelous ways God dwells among us.

With the *WISE MEN*, I will be forever in process, constantly in search of a deeper life, a fuller existence, for myself and for all God's people. I will seek always the face of the Lord.

With all the people of Christmas, I will look beyond the darkness of this world to the Everlasting Light. With lively hope, I will watch and wait. With renewed wonder, I will bend the knee and adore. With deepened gratitude, I will find increased strength in the blessed assurance of God-with-us. And so it is that I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.

Alice Mansfield is a writer living in Washington, D.C.

I wish that I could command my pen to tell you all how much your publication means to me, but, alas, my pen is as dumb as I on such deeply felt matters. Since the happy chance that brought my first issue of *F.I.P.*, my peace and joy in life have been immeasurably increased. As with all magical events, it occurred exactly as I needed my horizons widened by hearing of the hope and beauty and love that exists in the world. In all the world. When I open your magazine, it is as though my spirit is joined directly with the Spirit that joins us all. *F.I.P.* is a place where our world opens directly and visibly into God's world. Such glimpses cannot help but promote love, understanding, and peace among all beings. Blessings on each of you and on your work.

Jan Leith; Lincoln, IL

I just received your August edition, my first *F.I.P.* It is positively a treasure. I stayed on the first page for days, and everyone I have shared it with wants it. Are all issues so beautiful? If I could, I would order numerous subscriptions in order to spread such solid prayer living. We have placed Mr. Walsh's quote from Thick Nhat Hahn on our hospital bulletin board. Thank you for such inspiration.

Sr. Mary de Sales; Blackwood, NJ

I want to express my thanks to you for your February Introduction, "Spiritual Development," which I have copied for friends. It touched my life and expanded my understanding of the "constricted" ego, pain, and the freedom when one is centered.

As a meditator, I could identify with (Robert Granat's) article also. The Buddhist approach to suffering ties in with what you wrote about the limited, "clenched in" ego. As one who has gone on "centering" and "recentering" and mostly "decentering" while working the 12 steps of the Al Anon program, I have learned that I am powerless, but there is a Higher Power. I surrender to the Higher Power through prayer and meditation, praying to know God's will in my life and for the ability to carry it out. Still, it is a mystery, is it not, why and how some of us become initiated onto the path of freedom?

Name Withheld; Worcester, MA

I continue to applaud
the increasing power
of F.I.P. in your hands.
Amen.
Nixeon Civille Handy; Seattle, WA

I want to tell you how deeply I appreciate your work. Out of all the inspirational material I have ever received, yours is by far the best. You uphold a high standard for your articles, and they represent real people doing real thinking about what I see as the most important issue in life: spirituality. Thank you.
Y. H. Bethiem; New York, NY

I just took a break from my work to read something uplifting, and I was provided with:
Breathing in, I calm body and mind,
Breathing out, I smile with joy,
Dwelling in the present
This is the only moment.
(From the President's Message, August, 1988—Editor's note)
Frank Froehling; Stuart, FLA

I am not sure to whom I should direct my thoughts, but I need to tell someone of my excitement about your powerful, beautiful publication. You will note I asked for multiple copies, which I share with friends. Truly, I love everything about your magazine: its size, its format, its illustrations, the kind of paper on which it is written, and most of all of course, the articles, each of which I read, some of which I read several times. I pray that your unifying efforts be blessed, that you continue to both challenge and affirm my prayer style through the unique articles, which invite me to taste as well as savor, to explore as well as treasure, the many facets of God's way of meeting with us.
Alice Pitz; Racine, WI

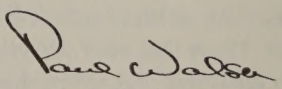
Dear Friends,

Every day we get letters and post cards from readers who say how much they depend on *Fellowship in Prayer* for the spiritual nourishment they need to sustain them in the midst of difficult and lonely lives. This mail comes from hospitals, nursing homes, jails, and old-age homes, and the writers tell us that we are their strongest ally in their struggle against fear, depression, and hopelessness. Our practice has been to honor all such requests, regardless of the writer's ability to contribute financially to Fellowship in Prayer.

Our success in carrying out this policy has now, however, confronted us with a painful dilemma. The more copies we print and mail out, the greater the expense and the greater the shortfall in our publications budget. One solution is to stop offering new, free subscriptions.

There is, however, a better and more compassionate solution—one that is endorsed by dedicated and generous readers like Evangeline A., of Mequon, Wisconsin, and Janet R., of Binghamton, New York. Evangeline writes, "Thank you for continuing to send me *FIP* when I couldn't pay. I hope the enclosed donation ($20) will also finance a subscription for someone else." Janet writes, "Enclosed is a contribution ($25) toward the cost of publishing and mailing *FIP*. I hope it will help pay for someone else who can't afford a contribution."

Clearly, if all who *could* send $10 or more would do so, we would also be able to meet the needs of those unable to help, but whose need is often the greatest. Won't *you* help by sending in your contribution today? God bless you, and may the joy and beauty of the holy season fill your heart with peace and happiness.



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We welcome articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience, religious faith or practices, and similar topics. Preference is given to experiential manuscripts. Manuscripts should not exceed 1500 words, should be typed, double spaced, and sent to The Editor, Fellowship In Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542. Please include a biography of no more than five lines.

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